

OPEN LETTERS.

The nomenclature question: Some points to be emphasized in the discussion.

In very recent literature may be found a discussion by the geologists that descended to unpardonable personality and vindictiveness, to which the attention of botanists may yet have to be recalled. In fact, an article has already been distributed that belongs to this category, for refusing to publish which the editors of at least two journals will be commended by all who favor dignified and honorable discussion of the points in dispute.

It would be wholly superfluous to argue at length for the entire elimination of personalities and imputation of improper motives in the discussion of any topic, and a mere allusion to the subject is sufficient. Equal condemnation should be meted out to those who attempt to belittle the work of their opponents, and to decry the branch of science cultivated by them. Such expressions as the "virtual exhaustion of the field of North American botany," "botanical nomenclature is not a scientific matter anyway," may be cited as the milder examples.

That there should have been some misunderstandings we must expect where the subject is of such deep interest as this reform in nomenclature has proven to be. While we do not criticise the disputants, we must deplore the fact that there occurred even unintentional depreciation of the character or standing of any representative body of botanists, or an unwarranted interpretation that charged such depreciation. But the answer has been given and should be accepted as satisfactory and final. A remark that was likewise unfortunate, "lay aside personal prejudice and join the remaining nine-tenths," has given much offense, apparently, to the opponents of reform. But I doubt not that the sentence was penned in a jocose mood, and surely did not deserve the attention it received.

It must be insisted that, while it may or may not be "out of place" for certain ones now to raise objection to the entire system of reform, when, in fact, the reform is virtually accomplished, those who have been instrumental in bringing about this change have not, in the least degree, intimated that discussion is to come to an end. Touching the points settled or the points unsettled, discussion can go on, freely as before. In fact, minor points are not fully agreed upon, and demand farther consideration. The cardinal principles are, however, settled as really as the foundations of organic evolution were determined when Darwin published his *Origin of Species*, though a storm of acrimonious opposition immediately broke forth.

It avails nothing to say that the "majority," or "nine-tenths" or the "non-systematic botanists," or the readers of horticultural journals, etc., are opposed to the system. In science, as elsewhere, the right will prevail ultimately. That this reform will even be inconvenient to the great mass of non-systematic botanists and readers, can scarcely

be claimed. It will, at most, be so to the few scores of botanists who have learned a few hundred names and have frequent occasion to use them, and to the teachers who "analyzed" flowers some years ago, and to whom would be annoying any changes in botany while they continue to have classes. This inconvenience will, however, disappear (except to those "teachers") in a brief time, and the trouble will be forgotten as soon as the Manuals give the correct names. Lists, catalogues, monographs, magazine articles, etc., that are now appearing, are fast supplying the names according to the new system, and the cry of "instability" while these changes are being accomplished, will likewise disappear shortly.

But even if this "inconvenience" were really great, and the mass of the people opposed to the reform, these facts would be no argument against the application of the main principles, which for some time have received recognition in the several departments of natural history. It may be added that foreign botanists—to wait for whom such earnest appeals have gone forth—quite generally accept the initial date for genera and species adopted by the Americans. That they really recognize the chief corner stone of the system, namely, the doctrine of priority, is shown by the fact that they wish others to join with them in excepting a greater or less number of genera from the effect of its application. Other and minor points receive recognition in part, so that on the whole the anxiety lest Americans may go too fast seems to be groundless.

Both publicly and privately it has been hinted and claimed that the List published has not yet been adopted nor officially sanctioned by the Botanical Club, as if that had something to do with the principles that were adopted, and according to which the committee was instructed to prepare the list. But, for a moment, suppose it were a matter of importance, how far is the claim really well founded? The committee was instructed not to consider and report on a subject, or to formulate a judgment or make recommendations, but merely to do a certain piece of work. The case is comparable to that of a committee to notify a person that has been nominated for a certain office or position, or to engross and present a memorial, or some similar work. It is evident that a discharge of the duty is final and could not in the nature of the case call for "authoritative sanction." If one raises the question as to whether the work of the committee on nomenclature was done according to the instructions given, then the question of "sanction" can be thought of. But the point here to be emphasized again is that this has absolutely nothing to do with the main question in the reform movement.

One other matter deserves a further remark. The opponents of change and reform say that nothing should be done at present because very soon there will be an international congress of botanists. Several have said in substance, both privately and publicly, that they would agree to the dictates of such a body and fall in line with whatever might be done. In other words, they resent the idea of authority when exercised (supposedly) by the Botanical Club, but covet the same when exercised by a larger body. I think their statements are made without due consideration. For my part, I consider nothing

“binding,” and will not agree to subscribe to and act in accord with anything that my judgment condemns. I rather think the systematic botanists will do the same. The “non-systematic botanists” may join together and repeal the Rochester Code, and all the other codes that were ever enacted, and yet that will not bring a return to the unsatisfactory and fast decaying system that they are trying to save. Dr. Winter applied the principle of priority even in the polymorphic fungi, and his work was never rejected nor his system condemned. In phenogamic botany, the reform has been virtually accomplished, and those who have been using it for some years will hardly turn backward. As intimated above, we are assured of sufficient literature for the near future for the convenience of the botanists who are working in other lines than systematic botany; sufficient also to enable all the progressive teachers to teach and to put in the hands of their pupils and students a nomenclature that can not give them trouble in the future.—W. A. KELLERMAN, *Columbus, Ohio, Aug. 24th.*

NOTES AND NEWS.

LOUIS PASTEUR died at his home near St. Cloud, France, on Saturday, September 28th, in the seventy-third year of his age.

MR. GEO. MURRAY has been appointed custodian of the botanical department of the British Museum in place of Wm. Carruthers resigned.

PROF. L. M. UNDERWOOD has accepted the chair of biology in the Alabama Polytechnic Institute at Auburn. He has returned from his vacation in Europe, and has already entered upon his new duties.

THE DEATH OF C. C. BABINGTON, professor of botany in Cambridge University (Eng.) occurred July 22d. He was 86 years of age, and had not been botanically active for more than a score of years. By his death this important chair of botany is left vacant.

PROF. G. F. ATKINSON notes that *Podophyllum peltatum* is to be added to the list of plants having an open style canal leading into the cavity of the ovary. The canal is a very wide and shallow one appearing in cross section as a crescent-shaped or broadly V-shaped slit, which lies transversely to the placental line.

MEINSHAUSEN¹ has lately published a monograph of the genus *Sparganium*. He discusses the geographical distribution and gives several interesting instances of the local occurrence of various forms. Seventeen species are enumerated with diagnoses in Latin. The following are new to science: *S. splendens*, *simile*, *Glehnii*, *subvaginatum*, *flaccidum* and *pusillum*.—T. H.

¹K. F. Meinshausen: Genre *Sparganium* L. Description systématique des espèces et leur distribution géographique d'après les observations faites au Gouvernement de St. Pétersbourg. Bull. de l'Acad. imp. d. sc. de St. Pétersbourg. N. S. 4: 21-41.